DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 245 528 FL 014 333

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TITLE A Survey of the Effects of Politics on Bilingual Education.
PUB DATE [83]
NOTE 19p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bilingual Education; *Bilingual Education Programs; *Educational History; Elementary Secondary Education; Federal Legislation; Federal Regulation; *Financial Support; *Government Role; Literature Reviews; *Political Influences; Public Opinion; Teacher Selection; Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

The history of bilingual education in the United States began with the earliest immigrants, but the recent phenomenon began in Florida and came to prominence in the national conscience in the 1974 Lau versus Nichols case concerning equal educational opportunity. The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 authorized widespread establishment of programs, and opposing views began to surface. Despite positive program results, much controversy still exists. Educators now need to improve the image of bilingual education programs but can also expect continuing reductions of support, and the problem of where financing should come from (federal or state sources) is still to be resolved. Finding bilingual/bicultural teachers is also sometimes difficult. Politicians have often confounded the distinction between language as a means of communication and as a sophisticated means of enhancing understanding between peoples of diverse cultural backgrounds, and have confused the educational and political aspects of bilingual education. Recent special funding has been provided for bilingual vocational education, but the federal government has stated that it will no longer be the principal impetus for bilingual education. However, it is the federal government's job to lead the states in providing a good education for every student in the United States and to set the standards to be met by state and local education agencies. (MSE)

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A SURVEY OF THE EFFECTS OF POLITICS ON BILINGUAL EDUCATION

by

Ian K. McDonald

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"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1) This is the beginning of man, at this time there was no need for bilingual education, as man only spoke one language. During the building of the tower of Babel, God gave the men at that time, many different tongues by which to speak. This was the beginning of the need for bilingual education in the world.

In preparing to write a paper on the effects of politics on bilingual education, I first really needed to gain an understanding of what it is, and how it came to be. In order to do this I decided to look at the history of this program.

Bilingual schools are not something new to the United States. This type of school was started by the immigrants, the United States has been populated by people of every nation. The earliest immigrants (1600-1800) discovered many problems as far as cultural and linguistic barriers, while trying to assimilate to the American culture. However, it was later that the immigrants faced the greatest opposition to their native culture and language and overt pressure to change and to assimilate. (Dimmerstein and Reimers 1975).

It was in Miami, Florida that the first bilingual program, funded by both private and public foundations began. It was the Cuban refugees who persuaded the officials in Dade County, Florida. This program soon became the unofficial demonstration

model school for the nation.(Cordasco 1969).

"Some form of bilingual education has existed in the U.S. for more than a century. Only in the last 20 years have bilingual education programs become widespread, however." (Nickel 1982). In his article, (Leeman 1980) states,"In 1974 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Lau v. Nichols that students could not be denied an equal educational opportunity because of language barriers." The reason behind this ruling was based on the basic idea that those students lacking in a clear ability to speak English must be taught that language as quickly as possible. While they are being taught English they should also, receive basic instruction in their native language so that they do not fall behind their classmates that speak English. Along with this decision came the need for requirements, some type of guidelines for implementation of Bilingual Education. What is the best way to help the students? Which students need help? Leeman reports on the guidelines that were established at this time; "The rules provide specific directions for student evaluation. Any youngster whose primary language is not English and who scores below the 40th percentile on an English language reading comprehension test chosen by the school district would be considered limited - English - proficient under the rules.

School districts would no longer be required to provide bilingual instruction and compensatory education when a student

becomes proficient in English, when he or she has been in the program for two years, or when reading comprehension scores are improved."

This type of program would cost around 532 million dollars. Other programs cost around 404 million dollars. "This approach calls for instruction in two languages for students who are limited in English and in their primary language. Under the second alternative, instruction would be in English for students superior in their native languages and having some knowledge of English." (Leeman 1980)

President Lyndon Johnson issued this statement about the Bilingual Education Act of 1968; " this law authorizes a new effort to prevent dropouts.... thousands of children of Latin descent will get a better start."(Barry 1983) HEW published the Lau Remedies in 1975 in response to the Lau decision. They include the following specific helps for meeting the needs of the Limited English Proficient student. They included the proposals of three types of programs, the first type of program ia a transitional bilingual education, the second was to be a bilingual bicultural education program while the third was a multilingual/multicultural education program. Even though these programs were recommended, there were no specifics of the curricular aides that would be given to these students to assure them of getting the equal education.

Opposing views of bilingual education began to appear around the country. Senator Hayakawa succinctly stated," This is America. We speak English." (Barry 1983) The defense of bilingual education was made with statements like this one by Paul Simon, " We are culturally isolated and guilty of a scandalous incompetence in foriegn languages."(Barry 1983) At the outset of the Vietnam War there was not one American-born specialist on Vietnam and that area, let alone one who spoke the languages of the area, or even understood the environment that we were going into.

" The Bilingual Act of 1978 heralded an end to the brief and controversial experiment of a full bilingual education program. It states that 'the objective of the program shall be to assist children of limited English proficiency to improve their language skills(1978).' Instruction in the primary language is allowed 'to the extent necessary to permit a child to achieve competence in the English language.' Emphasis is on 'transition' programs and 'mainstreaming,' along with a general movement toward federal deregulation."(Barry 1983)

"The need for bilingual programs was derived from the lack of school achievement of bilingual populations and the ever growing numbers of that population."(deFelix 1982) With more and more immigrants coming into the United States the

need for a better assimilation process was evident. Thus the bilingual education program was begun.

Although this program has been showing positive results, many people still have fears. "Quigg(1978), Herbert(1977), Bethell(1979), and Dyer(1980) all criticize bilingual education and imply a vague connection between it and antipatriotism." (deFelix 1982)

DeFelix continues, "These critics use inflammatory words and emotion laden phrases, usually evoking the scary notion that bilingual education will destroy our nation. Dyer talks about shaking'the very foundations of our society'(p.37) U.S. News (1978) claims that there is a 'spreading concern in Washington that the program went astray'(p.59)

With all the positive results being written about for the bilingual education program, where did some of the negative feelings come from? "The American Institute for Research (AIR) Report (1977) was the source for most critics of bilingual education. However, only Herbert refers to the criticism of that report: the researchers did not control for language ability, Any measurement of achievement given in English must take into consideration whether the subjects can comprehend enough English to understand what is required of them on the test.

Educators now need to start improving the image of bilingual education programs. There are different methods

for achieving this task. "First, educators should reassess their role in shaping public opinion. We traditionally relied on empirical studies to justify our work. Criticisms of bilingual education, however, have shown that this method will not assure public fears. And, as Parker and Heath(1978) warned, public opinion will have more impact on the future of bilingual education than will rational decisions based on research.Roeming (1970) reminded educators in the early days of federal funding for bilingual education that the enactment of legislation does not mean a national concern for bilingual or immigrant children's educational needs. A profession that prides itself in educating all children should be able to meet the challenge of educating the public regarding the need for programs for excluded groups.

Second, as resources diminish, educators can expect further criticisms of governmental attempts to rectify social ills through educational programs. Social commentators question the government's role in education, particularly since education is constitutionally a province of the state. Even though he missed the objective of bilingual education, journalist Noel Epstein ended his review of bilingual programs with the often-cited question. 'Is the national government responsible for financing and promoting attachments to ethnic languages and cultures?'(Epstein, 1977, p.70).

Third, educators need to propose solutions to the federal versus local financing quandry in the education of excluded groups. In the case of bilingual education federal involvement could be proposed for ten years. Under this proposal, the programs would be completely financed by the federal government during the first five years. Strict accountability, standardized curriculum and testing, and teacher education would promote good evaluation early. At the end of five years, the local education agency (LEA) would continue the same program but take on 20 percent of its financing. Each year the LEA would assume 20 percent more of the program's cost until at the end of the ten years it would be entirely financed by the LEA, but LEA would still be accountable to the funding source for a tenth year final report."(deFelix 1982)

When the Office of Civil Rights issued it s memorandum in May of 1970, "Discrimination and Denial Due to National Origin", bilingual education's role changed. It became one of an equal opportunity educational strategy.(Archer 1982)

The OCR memorandum was largely ignored until 1974, when a Chinese-American parent named Lau sued the city of San Francisco for discriminating on the basis of national origin and depriving his and 1800 other Chinese children of equal educational opportunity. This led to many changes in the way which the Bilingual Education Act was run.

Although the government has set up regulations for bilingual education, finding teachers qualified to teach is a problem in itself. There are very few people who are actually qualified in this area; those few who actually are qualified, generally are located in remote areas so that to bring them in to teach teachers would be expensive. In looking at the potential of such a program Ohio found that you not only needed bilingual teachers, but also teachers that are bicultural."As our program developed, we quickly found, as has been noted in programs all over the country, that there was another, equally important, facet to the teacher-student relationship,'biculturalism'.

We found that many Mexican-American teachers from Texas were not necessarily 'bicultural' themselves. Quite to the contrary, many were actively engaged in becoming as 'American' as possible as quickly as possible. Having received an 'Anglo' education themselves, they had forgotten or never learned much about their own Chicano heritage." (Anderson 1982)

So the next logical question was how do you teach someone to become "bicultural". Researchers came up with the following list:

"1. Having an 'understanding' of the culture, i.e. possession of factual information about the second culture.

2.The possession of 'empathy' for the second culture.

3. Having an experience working within a second cultural situation.

4. Displaying a positive attitude of acceptance, respect and appreciation for the other culture.
5. A conviction and/or recognition as to the legitimacy of the second culture.
6. Having the skills to be a 'cross-cultural' interpreter, one who will minimize the enevitable conflicts between a dominant and a subordinate culture.
7. Possession of mastery of special methodologies based upon tthe unique learning styles of the students of the other culture." (Anderson 1982)

Many states require field experience of students desiring to become teachers. Ohio has a similar program, when a student is training to be a bilingual teacher they are placed in a classroom with a significant number of bilingual children. This at least begins the students' familiarization with a bilingual-bicultural situation.

Kenneth N. Nickel surveyed the District of Columbia and all 50 states on four broad areas of bilingual education. The areas he was concerned with were, state laws and financial support; the training, certification, and compensation of bilingual education teachers; the extent and level of bilingual education programs in each state; and the languages that were covered by the programs. His summary,"There can be little doubt that a need exists for bilingual education programs. In fact,

with the influx of non-English speaking immigrants from Cuba, Haiti, and other nations, that need is likely to increase. But the Reagan Administration's stance toward categorical social service programs clouds the future of bilingual education for the rest of the Eighties."(Nickel 1982)

August 5,1980, the Department of Education published a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking(NPRM). The announcement was made the day before the start of the Democratic Convention. Questions can be raised as to whether the announcement was politically timed or just an accident. The proposal was as follows; "the proposed regulations required that transitional bilingual education be used to meet the needs of all language-minority students identified as eligible for services. It called for special instruction to encourage fluency in English while other content areas of the curriculum would be taught in the child's home language until that child mastered English well enough to succeed in all English instruction."(Baker and deKanter 1983)

The important parts of a succesful bilingual education program consists of these points:

- To the extent possible, all formal instruction should be in English with language one used as necessary to clarify that instruction.

- The student should be encouraged to communicate in English as much as possible.
- Instruction should be designed around the immersion model so that English is learned as other subjects are taught and curriculum is presented at a level of English Understanding commensurate with the students English development.
- More attention should be paid to incorporating nonlanguage remedial programs into the curriculum."(Baker and deKanter 1983)

"Since the overall pattern of program outcome is a mixture of successes and failures, Federal policy should become more flexible. However, to fully realize the potential of the language-minority student, other steps are also necessary.More(and better) research is needed. Demonstration programs examining alternatives must be developed. Information must be disseminated and technical assistance provided. Most importantly, the old adage, 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again!' must become part of Federal policy. While schools should be permitted to use any alternative that works, they should also be required to try something else if their current practices do not produce evidence of success."(Baker and deKanter 1983)

The use of English as a persons only language is a sign

of assimilation into the United States culture. So many people view bilingualism as the persons failure to assimilate into the culture of the host country. People gain these ideas from court rulings and government financing, changing the concept of bilingual education from a social issue into a political issue.

Charles R. Foster(1982) says,"It is unfortunate, therefore, that our leaders compound the confusion between the educational and the political aspects of bilingual education. For example, in a speech on 2 March 1981, President Reagan charged bilingual programs with deliberately impeding the acquisition of English skills among minority groups and thereby limiting their vocational preparation."

The President's report tends to view language as a medium of communication rather than as a sensitive and sophisticated means of enhancing understanding and empathy between peoples of diverse cultural backgrounds both at home and abroad. His report emphasized the declining number of people in trade, diplomacy, and security with foriegn language proficiency.

"A national plan that would provide a framework both for federal policies and activities at the state and local levels would lend additional credibility to bilingual programs. At present, even the statistical base for such a plan is lacking; data on minority language groups exist at the local but not at the national level."(Foster 1982)

In 1981 special funding was being given to bilingual education as reported by Jane Glickman(1980),"To fund bilingual vocational training programs for persons with limited English speaking ability, $2.5 million has been awarded for the 1980-81 school year under the Vocational Education Amendments of 1976.

The programs will train the students to be nurses, dental assistants,chefs, auto mechanics, electricians, and data entry technicians. In addition, the students will receive couseling, job placement, and follow up service.

Most projects will have two bilingual teachers working as a team, one handling the occupational side and the other, English. Through the four teacher training projects, bilingual vocational instructors and teachers of English as a second language can learn to develop their own curriculums and teaching techniques. Instructors in these projects speak Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, or French Creole."

"It is clear however, that since the advent of the present administration, the federal government will no longer serve as the principal impetus for bilingual education. The Department of Education's role, in Secretary Bell's words, will be to 'serve as a catalyst for local districts to build the necessary resources and capabilities to operate programs when federal

funding ceases."(Barry 1983)

The New York Times regularly campaigns against what they call the expensive bilingual education programs. " In opposition also is the administration of President Reagan. The cancellation of federal regulations mandating specific services for bilingual pupils by school districts was announced in 1981. Since the regulations had already been rejected by Congress during the previous administration, the announcement was an empty gesture, though it underscored the President's personally stated skepticism about bilingual education. In addition, bilingual education is openly opposed by some teachers' unions and by many school administrators."(Otheguy 1982)

"Defusing this issue will require concrete analysis of the effectiveness of alternative teaching models to support or refute theoretical and emotional posturing. More important, the universal benefits of acquiring and possessing competance in another language to promote an awareness and understanding of other cultures and to insure successful foreign relations will need wider recognition. In this, our national opinion makers, including the President, can play a crucial role by providing an accurate assessment of U.S. language needs and by furthering thoughtful understandings of the role bilingual education might play in meeting them."(Foster 1982)

The American approach to making reforms in programs like bilingual education, without first having clear definitions of the expected results, is a pragmatic one. And true to their forms, the federal, state, and local education agencies never have reached a clear and concise consensus over the specific goals of bilingual education.

"The Reagan Administration's first major act of educational policy has been to scrap proposed regulations that would have forced local school districts to provide bilingual teaching for pupils who did not know English well.

The new Education Secretary, Terrel Bell, said'I would like to use this regulation, symbolic of the many ills that have plagued the Federal Government, to telegraph a message to the American people. We will produce fewer and more reasonable rules and provide a more civil service.'"(Cookson 1981)

In making his statement Dr. Bell also warned that no one should read this as an invitation for discrimination against students who have limited English ability. It is however, to help schools set up intensive courses in English as opposed to the bilingual approach.

I feel that the federal government must lead the states in providing a good education for every student in the United States. This does not mean that they are to totally fund the programs, but they should set the standards that need to be

met by state and local education agencies. The states must have the freedom to set up their own programs, but they must set the programs up! That is the federal government's job, making sure that this is done. It is their job because no matter what language a person speaks, if he/she is a citizen of the United States he/she deserves to receive the best education possible.

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